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## ROBERT FRANCIS HARPER'S ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN LETTERS.<sup>1</sup>

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It is now a little more than eight years since Professor Harper issued the first part of his large and comprehensive work on the Assyrian letters which were found in the famous Royal Library at Nineveh and are now preserved among the collections of the British Museum, where they form a valuable and extremely important section of cuneiform literature. The idea of publishing a complete set of epistolary texts was a good one, first because they were of great historical importance, and secondly because the publication of one section of Assyrian literature in a complete form would enable the student to make himself master of a set of grammatical rules and idioms, which could not be studied from the stereotyped narrative of Assyrian annalistic texts. Professor Harper's work is already very well known among Assyriologists and not a few Semitic scholars in general, so we have no need to weary our readers here with any prolonged series of details concerning it. It will be sufficient to say that the present part is the fifth of the series of the valuable texts which he has edited, and that it is in no way inferior in point of general interest to its four predecessors. Professor Harper is to be congratulated, not only on having secured an excellent subject upon which to work, but also on having recognized its true importance and on the careful way in which he has set out to do justice to it. Many will remember the time when students, such as Professor Delitzsch, Mr. Samuel Alden Smith, and others, edited small, well-written letter-texts; and in the early days of scientific Assyriology their fellow-students received their publications with thanks, notwithstanding the fact that they lacked arrangement, classification, and system. Letter-texts have always been favorite objects of study,

<sup>1</sup> ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN LETTERS BELONGING TO THE KOUYUNJIK COLLECTIONS OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM. By Robert Francis Harper, Ph.D., Professor of the Semitic Languages in the University of Chicago. Chicago: *University of Chicago Press*; London: *Luzac & Co.*, 1900. Part V. xvi + 461-581 pp.

but this was due more to the fact that some scores of complete and well-written documents of the class existed than to any desire on the part of those who studied them to provide their readers with matter for work systematically arranged. The letters in the Kouyunjik Collection in the British Museum are several hundreds in number, and when Professor Harper undertook to make their contents known to the world, both by the publication of the original texts and by English translations of them, he set himself no light task. In the course of his work he found a very large number of fragments of letters, which he decided, and we think wisely, to include in his *corpus*, and it needs comparatively little study to find that the contents of such fragments fully justify his decision. Moreover, the information derived from one fragment supplements that found in another, and the identity of the scribe can often be established, even when his name is missing in the fragment. Curious expressions due to individual peculiarities of the writers, as well as unusual words and idioms, are also excellent clues as to the identity of unknown writers, but such minutiae of Assyrian epistolary composition could never have been traced without a comprehensive publication of letters, such as those with which Professor Harper now provides us. The student of these hundreds of texts will greatly appreciate the form which has been given to the edition; the texts are printed in Messrs. Harrison's excellent cuneiform type, and the leaves are printed on one side only. The usefulness of such a plan as this to the true student is indescribable, for it enables him when collating the printed copies with the originals to make notes, lengthy if necessary, on the forms of the characters, which his own readings may require. The use of type is of great assistance, even to the cuneiform expert, and it saves both his time and his eyesight. The reader of these observations will at once see their point if he will take the trouble to compare the text-publications of, let us say, Drs. Peiser and Winckler. We have no hesitation in saying that for ease in reading the original tablets are far to be preferred to their published copies of them.

In the fifth part of Professor Harper's work, now before us, we have the texts of one hundred and three Assyrian and Babylonian letters and memoranda, which brings the number of the documents of this class which he has published up to a total of five hundred and thirty-eight. They supply many interesting

details of the histories narrated in the official compilations of the old Assyrian governments, as well as considerable information as to the daily life of the subjects of the "Great King;" incidentally the texts are of the first importance for the study of Assyrian grammar. One letter (No. 524) is addressed to Sargon (B. C. 722-705); three (Nos. 534, 535, and 536) were written from Šamaš-šum-ukīn, Aššur-bāni-pal's rebel brother; one (No. 518) from the king; and one to the son of Aššur-bāni-pal (No. 469). Thirty-two deal with political, diplomatic, and official matters; ten relate to priestcraft, astrology, and religion; two to the transport of animals; and forty-five to matters of various kinds which we have no space to enumerate. The texts before us not only give us new material, but enable us to set straight certain misunderstandings which might easily arise in the mind of the student from the existing publications. One example of this will be sufficient. From Professor Harper's copy of No. 146 we see that there is no such place as Nagiu(?) or Nagiubirti-Akkad(?), which we find in the fifth volume of Dr. Bezold's *Catalogue* (p. 2132), and that what Dr. Bezold has regarded as a proper name is really only a description of the land Guriania; that the word na-gi-u actually means "district," and that the text gives <sup>ma</sup>tu na-gi-u birti Urarṭu "a district between Ararat," etc., and that Akkad has been misread for Urarṭu.<sup>2</sup>

The letters themselves are for the most part written by high officials, generals, and priests. One written by Ištar-šum-ereš, a royal astronomer, No. 519, gives a detailed explanation of certain astrological omens: "When Mars turned, it entered the midst of Scorpio; be not thou troubled(?) about thy watch (O King); the king on an evil day should not go forth from the gate. This quotation is not from any definite Series of Omens, but is a saying of the common people." Another, wanting the name of the writer (No. 469), was written to the son of Aššur-bāni-pal.

It is especially interesting to see more of the letters of such well-known generals as Bel-ibni and Aššur-rišua. The latter held a large command during the troubles on the northern border during Sargon's reign, and by examining his letters, and those of his contemporaries and coadjutors, we may glean a good deal of history. Several of the letters dealing with these events were translated by Rev. C. H. W. Johns, in the *Proceedings of the*

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 166, note 7.

*Society of Biblical Archæology*, Vol. XVII, pp. 220 *sqq.* The campaign on the northern frontier was of considerable importance, and the texts in Professor Harper's latest volume, as well as some unpublished fragments, throw fresh light on the events which took place.

The Official Records of Sargon's reign state that Ursa, the king of Ararat, stirred up the Mannai and other northern tribes to revolt from Assyria; and the chief of the Mannai slew the legitimate heir to the throne, and set up one Ullusunū in his stead. The Assyrians marched against them, Ursa was defeated, and Ullusunū fled to the mountains, while his strong cities fell into Sargon's hands; the cities of the Andiai, a rebellious tribe, also fell, and the chief of the Zikirtai fled almost without striking a blow. Later on, Urzana of Muṣaṣir, who had trusted to the king of Ararat, was punished in like manner, and Ursa in despair committed suicide. If we compare the letter-texts, the story that they tell does not appear quite to coincide with the official account. The difficulty is to assign them to their proper chronological order; however, they appear to give this result: The northern tribes rose, and, under the king of Ararat, entered the city of ʾTuruṣpa; Ursa then set out for El-izzada in the month Nisan, while he detached a force under ʾKaḫḫadanu, his tartan, to Uesi. The approach of his force induced Urzana of Muṣaṣir, who had hitherto been friendly to Assyria, to join the northern coalition; but, while he was sending to negotiate with Ursa, the Kimmerians came into conflict with the army of Ararat and completely defeated it.

Let us take the letters in detail and see how they bear out the above short *précis*. Suspicion of the intrigues on the northern frontier has evidently reached the Assyrian king, for he counsels his officers in those regions to keep strict watch and ward over Ararat. Aššur-riṣua (No. 148) is directed to send a scout<sup>3</sup> to the city of ʾTuruṣpa, a city in Van, probably known to the Greeks as Thôspia, on Lake Thospitis. Aššur-ukin (No. 434), having been ordered to be vigilant, and to send to the base any casualties that may fall into his hands, now sends two from Mannai, one of them an officer, that they may be questioned about the news on the frontier. Gabbu-ana-Aššur (No. 123) is also directed to

<sup>3</sup> Daili, from dālu; cf. W.A.L., iv, 30\*, obv. 16; alū ša kima šelab ali šaḫumeš ina muši idul atta "Thou art the alū which like a pariah dog prowleth furtively by night;" Syr. dāl = *se movit, tremuit*.

watch Ararat, to which end he sends messengers to the frontier outposts under the command of Nabu-mudu, Aššur-rišua, and Aššur-bel-danan. He has at last heard a rumor that the king of Ararat is in Țurušpa and will not advance farther at present. Certain news then reaches Sargon that the enemy is in Țurušpa, and an Assyrian force operating in that region has been captured. Aššur-rišua (No. 144) reports the capture of an officer and twenty men, and, further, the king of Ararat has entered Țurušpa, capturing Uršini, the second tartan.<sup>4</sup> This appears to have been in the nature of a surprise; for the letter goes on to say that the brother of Uršini has gone off to make inquiries to see whether the Assyrian troops were fully equipped and prepared. With the advance of the king of Ararat the revolt spread like wildfire. Țutešupu (No. 215), in answer to Sargon's request for news of Ararat, declares he has heard nothing but treason and insurrection, and the Zikirtai have thrown off their allegiance to his royal master and are in open revolt. Aššur-rišua (No. 381), who is in command of a large garrison probably not far from Mušašir, reports that the Mannai have risen, and that the governors of Mušašir and Karsitu are proceeding to the Mannai borders to report on the movements of the hostile force, whose leader is still in Țurušpa, sacrificing for battle. Mušašir is undoubtedly the modern Mushakshir, to the west of Lake Van, while Karsitu is probably Garsit, on the southern edge of that lake.

In the month Nisan the king of Ararat made a further move southward. According to Aššur-rišua (No. 492<sup>5</sup>), in the beginning of the month, Țaḫḫadanu, the second in command of the hostile forces, was dispatched to Uesi, while the king himself went to El-izzada. Another officer reports to Sargon much to the same effect (No. 444), that five of the enemy's commanders have reached Uesi, among whom are Sitinu and Țaḫḫadanu, and

<sup>4</sup> This is probably the reason for the absence of news from the second in command (? Uršini), for which Aššur-rišua censures that officer (No. 382). It is possible that the fragment K. 683 refers to a check to the Assyrian arms, which perhaps should be inserted here; cf. obv. ll. 22 sqq.: *asapara ana mātu Manai ana mātu Mazamua ina mātu Ḫaban am ṣabi pl. ibāšši ultu libbi-šunu ultu mātu Manai našuni umma šarru išaparan am ḫubtu ušašbit šarru bel-ni uda šummu šitu anaku šummu la epišu anaku uma ša alu Šalmat*, etc., i. e., "I sent unto Mannai and Mazamu; there are troops in Ḫaban, and some of these brought (word) from Mannai, thus: 'The king (of Ararat) hath sent, "I have made a capture."' The king, my lord, knows whether I am careless or lazy; now from the Black (Šalmat) city, etc." Šalmat city was probably on the Šalmat river; see further.

<sup>5</sup> The tablet is broken at the beginning of l. 5, but I think we should read *šarru* for the first character.

the king of Ararat has left Țurušpa for Țaniun. Meanwhile the Assyrian army had been preparing to cope with the northern danger, and we find Aššur-rišua (No. 380) reporting that he has concentrated a brigade of three thousand infantry on the borders in readiness to march to Mušašir, and that they are already over the Black (Šalmat) river. In addition to these, there are also the troops of Sunai, the governor of the Ukkai. At the time of the sending of this report the king of Ararat was still in Uesi.

It is interesting to see what was going on among the rebellious tribes of the Zikirtai and Andiai. News reaches the king (No. 515), "in the matter of the news of Ararat;" the messengers of the Andiai and Zikirtai go to the city of Uesi and say, "the king of Assyria is against us."

If we turn to the few letters of Urzana, king of Mušašir, now extant, we find him professing loyalty to the Assyrian cause. In No. 409 he replies, in answer to a request for news of the hostile force, that the governors of Uesi and the Ukkai tribe have come to him in Mušašir to say that the king of Ararat has reached Uesi. Urzana goes on to say that he is aware that he has been told not to give safeguard to the enemy through his land. In an unpublished letter (S. 1056) he prays for the defeat of the foes of the king (of Assyria). A broken letter, perhaps from Sennacherib (S. 96, perhaps part of Rm. 978), confirms the truth of the journey of the governor of Uesi to Mušašir. It is probable that it was about this time that Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, was appointed as commander-in-chief of the northern armies operating against Ursa. A note (No. 448) shows that the troops of Mušašir are stationed in Siḥana of Mas, though whether they are still faithful to Assyria is difficult to say. Then comes the news that the army of Ararat is over the border (K. 1120, unpublished).<sup>6</sup> A new danger at once threatens Ararat. The army of Ararat comes into conflict with the Kimmerians, and suffers a serious defeat. From all sides reports reach the Assyrian base to this effect: Paḥir(?) - Bel tells some staff officer, who forwards his message (Rm. 554, unpublished), that Urzana (the king of Mušašir) has told him that "the king of Ararat, after he had gone to Gamir, his army was defeated and the governor of Uesi slain." Sennacherib, who is in receipt of all the dispatches of

<sup>6</sup> Obv. ll. 4 *sgg.*: mā am e-mu-ḫi ša mātu Uraṛṭi ina eli taḥume ital-kūni, etc.

the commanders on the frontier, gives a résumé of their reports (No. 197): The Ukkai regiment states that the king of Ararat invaded Kimmeria, but was defeated; Aššur-rišua says that the land is now quiet, the king is now in Ušaun (possibly the modern Wastan, on the southeastern edge of Lake Van), but Ẹaḫḫadanu, the tartan of Ararat, was captured; Nabu-Mudu also says that the Kimmerians defeated the king of Ararat. The letter goes on to say that the people of Mušašir and Hubuškia have gone to arrange an alliance with the king of Ararat, and this is probably a reference to Urzana's defection from Assyria. However, it is unlikely that he would knowingly ally himself to a defeated force, and we must suppose that he had not heard of the success of the Kimmerians.

The letter-tablet 79-7-8, 292 (unpublished) gives an account of the slaying of nine hostile commanders, among whom are those operating against the writer, against Ša-Aššur-gubbu, and around Mušašir and Ušae (*sic*), and mentions Ararat (obv. 2). It goes on to say that "their king took to the mountains alone." In another unpublished fragment (K. 1111) the writer says that one Irnia, an officer of Ẹaḫḫadanu, relates a tale of disaster.

Another notice of the defeat of Ararat by the Kimmerians is to be found on No. 146 from Aššur-rišua, obv. ll. 5 *sqq.*: "The land Guriania, a district<sup>7</sup> between Ararat and Gamirra, gives tribute to the people of Ararat: when the people of Ararat had gone against Gamirra, and when defeat had been inflicted upon the people of Ararat . . . ." Sennacherib makes further mention of the king of Ararat on No. 198, but it is not easy to make connected sense of his report.

The main difficulty in dealing with historical letters of this class is, as has been said before, the uncertainty of the chronological order; and the internal evidence of the letters themselves very often gives no clue. But nothing complete can be done in this direction until the whole of the Kouyunjik letters are published. It is much to be hoped that Professor Harper will finish the great work he has undertaken, and then give us the translations with vocabularies and lists of proper names.

<sup>7</sup> (5) mātu Gu-ri-a-ni-a mātu na-gi-u (6) bir-te mātu Urarṭi bir-te mātu Ga-mir-ra, etc. This is obviously the right way to translate this phrase, and not as Bezold has it, *Catalogue*, Vol. V, p. 2132, col. i (under Nagiu): "Nagiu (? or Nagiubirti-Akkad?). Country?" Birti "between" is used very much in the same way as the Hebrew bēn. Since Professor Harper's publication of this tablet I have joined a small fragment to it (K. 12992), which mentions eight thousand (soldiers?), rev. 3.



Many will read with regret the protest which Professor Harper feels compelled to make against the treatment which the documents in the British Museum have received at the hands of certain Assyriologists, whom he deliberately accuses of having "often scratched signs in such a way as to make them read as they thought they should." Such a proceeding is, of course, in itself monstrous, especially as it removes from future workers all possibility of ever discovering the true reading, and we cannot help feeling that it represents an attempt to compel every reader of the tablet to agree with the views of the person who adopted such a disingenuous method of perpetuating his own misreading of the signs. Here we must take leave of a volume in which we have a number of most valuable texts carefully copied and well printed, with the hope that the future parts of the work will appear as fast as the editor's professorial duties will permit.